



# SHAKOPEE FIRE DEPARTMENT

*Fire & Life Safety for a Growing Community*



## SMOKE ALARMS

The majority of fatal home fires happen at night when people are asleep. Contrary to popular belief, the smell of smoke may not wake a sleeping person. The poisonous gases and smoke produced by a fire can numb the senses and put you into a deeper sleep.

Inexpensive household smoke alarms sound an alarm, alerting you to a fire. By giving you time to escape, smoke alarms cut your risk of dying in a home fire nearly in half.

### **Choosing an Alarm**

Be sure that the smoke alarms you buy carry the mark of an independent testing laboratory. Several types of alarms are available. Some run on batteries; others run on household current. Some detect smoke using an "ionization" sensor; others use a "photoelectric" detection system. All approved smoke alarms, regardless of type, will offer adequate protection provided they are installed and maintained properly.

**"Ionization"** sensor models are typically more sensitive and are better at detecting fast burning fires.

**"Photoelectric"** sensor models are better at detecting slow burning fires.

### **Is One Enough?**

Every home should have a smoke alarm outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home, including the basement. Every home should also have smoke alarms in each bedroom. Codes now require a smoke alarm in each sleeping room for new construction. On floors without bedrooms, alarms should be installed in or near living areas, such as dens, living rooms, or family rooms.

Be sure everyone sleeping in your home can hear your smoke alarms' alarms. If any residents are hearing impaired or sleep with bedroom doors closed, install additional alarms inside sleeping areas. There are special smoke alarms for the hearing impaired; these flash a light in addition to sounding an audible alarm.

Smoke alarms are not recommended for kitchens, bathrooms, or garages - where cooking fumes, steam, or exhaust fumes could set off false alarms - or for attics and other unheated spaces where humidity and temperature changes might affect an alarm's operation.

### **Where to Install**

Because smoke rises, mount alarms high on a wall or on the ceiling. Wall-mounted units should be mounted so that the top of the alarm is 4 to 12 inches from the ceiling. A ceiling-mounted alarm should be attached at least 4 inches from the nearest wall. In a room with a pitched ceiling, mount the alarm at or near the ceiling's highest point.

In stairways with no doors at the top or bottom, position smoke alarms anywhere in the path of smoke moving up the stairs. Always position smoke alarms at the bottom of closed stairways, such as those leading from the basement. Dead air trapped near the door at the top of a stairway could prevent smoke from reaching an alarm located at the top.

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## **Installation**

Most battery-powered smoke alarms and alarms that plug into wall outlets can be installed using only a drill and a screwdriver by following the manufacturer's instructions. Plug-in alarms must have restraining devices so they cannot be unplugged by accident. Alarms can also be hard-wired into a building's electrical system. Hard-wired alarms should be installed by a qualified electrician. Never connect a smoke alarm to a circuit that can be turned off from a wall switch.

## **False Alarms**

Cooking vapors and steam sometimes set off a smoke alarm. To correct this, try moving the alarm away from the kitchen or bathroom, or install an exhaust fan. Cleaning your alarm regularly, according to manufacturer's instructions, may also help.

If "nuisance alarms" persist, do not disable the alarm. Replace it.

## **Maintenance**

- Only a functioning smoke alarm can protect you. Never disable an alarm by "borrowing" its battery for another use.
- Following manufacturer's instructions, test all your smoke alarms monthly, and install new batteries at least once a year - when you set the clocks back in the fall, for example, or when an alarm is "chirping" to indicate that the battery is low.
- Clean your smoke alarms using a vacuum cleaner without removing the alarm's cover.
- Never paint any part of a smoke alarm.
- Smoke alarms don't last forever. Replace any smoke alarm that is more than 10 years old.

## **Plan and Practice**

- Make sure everyone in your household is familiar with the sound of the alarm's alarm.
- Plan escape routes. Know at least two ways out of each room. Agree on a meeting place outside your home where all residents will gather after they escape. Practice your escape plan at least twice a year.
- Remove obstructions from doors and windows needed for escape.
- Make sure everyone in the household can unlock doors and windows quickly, even in the dark. Windows or doors with security bars should be equipped with quick-release devices, and everyone in the household should know how to use them.
- When an alarm sounds, leave immediately. Go directly to your meeting place, and call the fire department from a neighbor's phone or portable phone.
- Once you're out, stay out. Never go back inside a burning building.